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SUBJECT: LIBERAL PARTY LEADER ON PLANS FOR 2006 ELECTORAL SEASON

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood. Reasons: 1.4 B & D.

1. (SBU) Senator Juan Fernando Cristo, the President of the Officialist Liberal Party (PLC), told us that his party's planning for the 2006 electoral season is still in the early stages. Cristo believed that a nationwide party primary would be the vehicle to select its presidential nominee. He identified former Bogota Mayor Enrique Penalosa, two-time failed presidential nominee Horacio Serpa, Senator Rodrigo Rivera, and perhaps Senator Rafael Pardo as the likely aspirants. While the Party might still consider letting President Uribe run for the nomination in the primary, he believed that the chances were slim.

2. (SBU) Cristo commented that ongoing negotiations between dissident, pro-Uribe Liberals and the PLC had been fruitless. While Cristo admitted that some PLC leaders would welcome President Uribe (himself a former PLC member) as a competitor for the nomination, he held out little hope for such a possibility. Former president and OAS SYG Cesar Gaviria, Cristo said, was not interested in a presidential run but would likely become the PLC's next head during the summer.

3. (C) Comment: The PLC is in disarray. There are rumors that the PLC could join forces with several parties of the left for 2006 (septel). Nonetheless, the PLC is still Colombia's largest party, which holds the majority of governorships and has majorities in most departmental legislatures. Were the Constitutional Court to strike down reelection, the PLC's presidential prospects could change dramatically.

WOOD